

SCHOOL CORPORATION ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

In 1996 the Indiana General Assembly passed legislation that separated school and student performance information from the annual financial reports published by school districts in local newspapers, and it established the school corporation annual performance report law (IC 20-1-21). The format and content of the annual performance reports have evolved since the passage of Public Law 34-1996. To continue efforts to improve the reports, the Indiana Department of Education recommends modifying the statutory provisions pertaining to the time line for publication and the list of benchmark indicators that must be included in the reports. The changes proposed by the Department will further the utility and effectiveness of the reports by ensuring the inclusion of the most current, complete, and accurate data.

When the annual performance report law was established, a September 1 through September 15 publication period was selected in anticipation that complete data would be available for the school year just concluded. Many data items for the previous school year are not available until after the reporting period. Dropout data, Core 40 completion, Academic Honors Diploma completion, and data about the percentage of graduates who pursue higher education all are reported on forms due on or around October 15. Information about PSAT, SAT, ACT, and AP performance also is received in the fall. This results in incomplete data items in the annual report, or the data may be a year out of date.

To resolve this problem, the Department recommends changing the publication period to January 1 through January 15. Changing the publication period to January will allow for more complete data, including the latest ISTEP+ scores from the fall.

In addition to changing the publication period, the Department recommends changes to the list of benchmark indicators found in IC 20-1-21-9. The proposed changes would provide uniformity in the data school districts and the Department compile, with what is reported in the annual performance reports. A few new indicators will be added to provide meaningful information to the public about student enrollment and the number and percentage of students who have limited English proficiency. Finally, this proposal removes statutory language concerning obsolete components of the performance-based accreditation system and separates the quantifiable information from that better reported in narrative form.

REPORTING ARRAIGNMENTS AND CONVICTIONS OF LICENSED SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Under present law (IC 20-6.1-3-7), the Superintendent of Public Instruction may bring charges to the attention of the Indiana Professional Standards Board which has the authority to revoke a

license of certified school personnel when such a person has been convicted of a limited list of crimes, generally heinous crimes against children. The Standards Board has virtually no authority to take action against a license in a number of other cases. Due to shortcomings in state law, individuals may face little consequences professionally for acts of wrongdoing, misconduct, or immorality and continue to work in schools by resigning from their current positions and seeking and securing employment in another school district in a different community.

The Indiana Department of Education proposes to establish a uniform process for the reporting of arraignments and convictions of licensed school personnel. Specifically, the Department recommends enacting a law that requires accredited schools to report to the Department the arraignments of persons with a teaching license (including administrators, school librarians, and counselors, as well as classroom teachers) for any criminal act. Such a law will give the Department the ability to investigate, contact the local prosecutor to advise of its interest in the matter, and pursue whatever recourse is available. Potential recourse could include suspension or revocation of the teacher's license. Additionally, it is recommended that all convictions under IC 20-6.1-3-7 be reported by the local prosecutor to the superintendent of the school corporation of which the individual is employed. The superintendent shall then notify the state Superintendent of Public Instruction of such convictions.

By expressing an interest in a case, the Department can ask for license suspension or surrender as a part of a plea agreement or conviction. This proposal also would help to prevent teachers and administrators from resigning their current positions and seeking employment in another district or obtaining a reciprocal license from another state.

CHANGE KINDERGARTEN ENROLLMENT DATE FROM JULY 1 TO SEPTEMBER 1

Although the Indiana General Assembly adjusted the kindergarten entrance date by one month during the 2001 session, Indiana's July 1 date is still, by far, the earliest in the nation. The current law establishing this date prevents thousands of children (whose birthdays are in July and August) from having access to appropriate learning opportunities at the most important time in their development.

Changing the kindergarten entrance date to September 1 will not force any children to attend school earlier but will welcome children who turn 5 in July and August. Parents still will make the decision about when to enroll their child in school. In Indiana, compulsory education does not begin until the year of the child's seventh birthday.

Having disadvantaged children spend an extra year in environments that do not promote their growth and learning will likely put them even farther behind their peers who have access to quality educational opportunities. Dr. Lilian Katz, Director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on

Elementary and Early Childhood Education and Professor Emerita of Early Childhood Education at the University of Illinois, writes:

I hope the legislators of Indiana keep in mind the number of Indiana youngsters for whom public school kindergarten will likely be their first opportunity for education . . . Indeed it is likely that the current late entry age has its greatest impact on low-income families and their children. In this way, the disparities among children can only be exacerbated (letter to the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children, June 9, 1998).

Indiana's July 1 kindergarten entrance date is inconsistent with those of the rest of the states and current research. The state with the closest kindergarten entrance date to Indiana is Missouri with an August 1 date. The majority of states have a date in September or later, with September 1 being the most common date (17 states). Surrounding states' entrance dates are: Illinois, September 1; Ohio, September 30; Kentucky, October 1; Michigan, December 1.

Indiana's July 1 date causes difficulties for many families who move from other states to Indiana. Parents, who anticipate a move **from** Indiana, also express concerns about their children being so much older than classmates in their new state. Recent research, published in *The Journal of Pediatrics*, finds adolescents who are old-for-grade have higher rates of behavior problems and of risky behaviors, including drug use. The report also states that delaying school entry also may delay detection and treatment of undiagnosed developmental delays or learning disabilities. Such delays may predispose children to later problems. ("Increased Behavior Problems Associated with Delayed School Entry and Delayed School Progress," *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 100(4), 659, 1997)

Additionally, the National Association of School Psychologists reports the following research on delayed kindergarten entrance:

- Delaying kindergarten until the age of 6 has not resulted in improvement in reading, writing, or math skills.
- Delayed entrants 4 to 12 years after entering school were no more academically skilled, athletically involved, or socially successful than students who had entered kindergarten just after turning 5 years old.
- Students who are one year too old for a grade level are much more likely to drop out of high school.

(National Association of School Psychologists. *School Entry Decisions: A Guide for Parents*, 1, 1998)

Many school corporations understand the implications of keeping children out of kindergarten until they are 6 and have chosen to exercise the appeal process [IC 20-8.1-3-17(e)] to allow children with birth dates on or before September 1 to enter kindergarten, provided that space is available. The Indiana Department of Education applauds these corporations' actions, even

though, once again Indiana is faced with a disparity in the entry date between school corporations that the 1987 legislation addressed.

If a kindergarten curriculum does not meet the needs of five-year-olds, then the appropriateness of the curriculum needs to be questioned. A developmentally appropriate curriculum is based on research of child development, how children learn, and the strengths and needs of individual children.

Scientists are emphasizing how critical the first ten years of life are in terms of brain development. The kindergarten entrance date needs to be moved to September 1 to provide Indiana's children the opportunity for quality educational experiences during this critical window of opportunity for learning.

INTERAGENCY TASKFORCE FOR SPECIAL POPULATION SERVICES

The challenge of ever-increasing demands on limited funds for services to children and young adults with disabilities requires innovation and collaboration to identify ways to streamline services, maximize the federal, state, and local funds directed to such services, eliminate duplication of services, and ensure the availability of an array of services to children with disabilities and their families. Effective ways to integrate service delivery and fiscal resources must be identified, and barriers to such integration removed.

The Department of Education, the Division of Family and Children, the Division of Mental Health and Addiction, the Division of Disability, Aging, and Rehabilitative Services, the Office of Medicaid Policy and Planning, the Department of Health, the Department of Correction, and local education agencies all play a role in services to children and young adults with disabilities, either as a service provider, a funding source, or both. A number of children with disabilities and their families receive services from, or have services funded by, more than one of these agencies at any given time. Barriers to coordination and integration of service delivery and funding result in service and funding decisions being made in isolation.

A taskforce of representatives from these agencies, under the direction of the state director of special education, can identify new strategies for coordinating, integrating, and streamlining service delivery to children with disabilities and their families, as well as strategies that assure the maximum use of available federal, state, and local resources. Implicit in the taskforce's review is the identification of agency and legislative barriers, as well as recommendations for eliminating these obstacles.

A report on these methods, to be made available to the superintendent of public instruction, the secretary of the office of family and social services, and the commissioners of the departments of health and correction, will provide the framework for moving toward improved service delivery and more efficient utilization of fiscal and other resources. This report may result in subsequent legislative initiatives during the 2003 session of the Indiana General Assembly.

MAINTAIN INDIANA'S 180-DAY INSTRUCTIONAL CALENDAR

The Indiana Department of Education adamantly opposes any effort to reduce Indiana's 180-day school calendar or change to an hour equivalency policy. Indiana's school day requirements are minimums rather than optimums (they are comparable to requirements in other states; and our school year is on par with 35 other states). The requirement for a minimum number of instructional days is the only way to guarantee that students will meet with each of their teachers for the minimal time needed to acquire essential skills.

The current waiver system, which accommodates single building closures and abbreviated school days, realistically addresses unforeseen circumstances while still providing some protection for learning opportunities. Full-day, corporation-wide closures must be rescheduled. Failure to reschedule a canceled day means that students lose an opportunity to meet with their teachers. Changing to an hour equivalency would be an accounting nightmare for administrators and is not as attractive as it seems when transportation problems and different schedules at different buildings are considered. Indiana State Board of Education rules and Department of Education policies also accommodate time during the school year for parent-teacher conferences, professional development, and school improvement planning.

In considering a change to an hour equivalency system, it is necessary to examine the reasons schools have a day that is longer than the minimum. We assert that these schools want to do more than the minimum for their students. It could mean that they want a seven-period high school day. It could mean that these schools have created additional enrichment opportunities for their students. All those things would be jeopardized if the minimum were to be changed to an hour equivalency. Invariably, students would lose instructional time.

A problem with adding more minutes to the school day for noninstructional purposes or to waive make-up days at the end of the year is that it would result in exceedingly long days for students, especially those who rely upon school buses for transportation. If a school would like to increase the minutes per day of instructional time to allow for staff development days, it also would have to add extra minutes for cancellations. Excessively long days would be the result.

One reason that the students throughout this country, do poorly in areas, such as math and science, in comparison to students in Europe and Asia is that they attend school considerably fewer days per year. For example, the instructional calendar in Germany is 188 days, Japan 220 days, and Korea 222 days.

Pursuant to IC 20-10.1-2-1, an emergency policy can be implemented by the Superintendent of Public Instruction in response to extreme weather conditions. The emergency policy, if declared, makes it possible for districts adversely affected by poor weather to request a waiver of penalty for loss of instructional days. The primary objective in issuing the policy is to provide as much instructional time for Indiana's students as possible, while recognizing the importance of offering flexibility to districts where hardships exist. This policy should be maintained.

As we move forward with educational reform in Indiana, we can now begin to see progress that has been made because of these reforms. Now is not the time to back away from the foundation that has been established by the Indiana General Assembly. The minimum 180-day school year was one of the first and hardest fought battles at the beginning of the reform. We must continue to move forward without backing away from the important commitments that have been made.

This General Assembly must move forward with a clear message. We must continue on the path we have chosen, to honor the hard work of our predecessors and not back away from our commitment to the future.